

HUMOR BEHIND THE SCENES AT TEHERAN

The legendary political skills of Franklin D. Roosevelt were never more evident than in the case of the flight of the Chinese diplomats from Cairo to Teheran in November 1943.

There were five or six men in this delegation. Many of them had never been out of China before, let alone flown in a U.S. Army Air Force plane with military crew. Roosevelt knew that and wanted to put them at their ease.

The author received a call early one morning in Cairo to prepare the Lode-star for a VIP flight to Teheran. He called the crew chief and radio man to be sure they were there early to see that the plane was ready and clean.

Shortly after sunrise, the author arrived in Operations and went out to the ramp in front. There was the plane and an irate crew chief. He said, "Captain, someone has filled the plane with big boxes and won't let me take them off for our passengers."

There, packed tightly against the rear seats, was a stack of large cartons of corn flakes. These were the wholesale cartons in which big, family-size corn flakes boxes were shipped.

At that moment, a major who had come from Washington, D.C., to help with the details of the Cairo conference came up to the author and said that those cartons had been placed on the plane "on express orders from President Roosevelt." Needless to say, they left them there and prepared the plane for departure.

Two limousines arrived later, the Chinese stepped out and were escorted to the plane. Not long after, they left Cairo and were on their way across Palestine en route to a mid-point fueling stop in Iraq. The author went back to see how the passengers were doing. There they were, all six Chinese, each one with a large box of corn flakes open

and eating them as Americans eat popcorn — right out of the box.

This was a small but most thoughtful and understanding act on the part of a busy president. He happened to know that the Chinese liked corn flakes, and he knew that this small gesture would welcome them to an American plane, an American crew and put them at their ease.

The remainder of the flight was marked by one more incident of note.

The Russians were the hosts in Teheran and had totally taken over the city. As the author approached with the Chinese delegation in a line of cars from the airport, he noted that an enormous, royal purple velvet curtain had been hung like a wall all around the central blocks of the city. No one was to get inside that curtain without proper credentials.

As the cars with the Chinese approached the entry checkpoint, another small group of cars came into view ahead. In the lead car, with a small British Union Jack flying from the front fender, was Winston Churchill. He had traveled in his famous "bomb shelter" one-piece jumper suit. It had no pockets, and Churchill, save for his ever-present cigar, had no credentials with him. The young Russian soldiers at the gates, with automatic weapons held firmly, were not about to let anyone inside that curtain without proper credentials.

Ten or 15 minutes passed before a British officer prevailed upon some proper Russian authority to let that unidentified man in the lead car, that man with the famous cigar, through the curtain and into the Russian-held city of Teheran.

The Chinese visitors seemed to enjoy that scene as much as they had the flight and President Roosevelt's corn flakes.

— L. Fletcher Prouty